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ABSTRACT

The United States Commissioner of Education discusses a broad view of educational needs and ways in which society must begin to respond to them. The need for quality educators and the renewal of our present corps of teachers through teacher controlled and developed inservice education is stressed. Life-long education with equal opportunity for all members of society to learn according to their abilities and desires is a goal that must be realized. The integration of education with other portions of social life is also of primary concern--tying school, home, and work into a smoothly functioning whole. And finally, education must strive to make people cognizant of global concerns: making humankind responsive to the problems of environmental pollution and overpopulation, and the urgent need to develop a world society in which people can live in a civilized relationship with each other. (MJB)

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TEACHER RENEWAL IN A CHANGING WORLD *

Ernest L. Boyer
U. S. Commissioner of Education

I

In Moby Dick, Ishmael describes himself as having "an everlasting itch for things remote." In this democracy, we must reaffirm that everyone -- not the favored few -- should be given the opportunity to scratch the everlasting itch.

It's time to reaffirm the centrality of education in this Nation; it's time to say what's right about our schools; it's time to counter critics who seem more intent on cutting budgets than on educating children; and it's time to declare that education has been and must always be at the top of our agenda.

In 1647 -- long before our Revolution -- the Massachusetts Bay colonists passed a law requiring every town and village to appoint a schoolmaster to teach the children to read and write. Those first immigrants wanted to prepare their children to master what today we'd call "the basics."

As the Nation grew, simply learning how to read and write became not enough. Grammar school was now the goal, and, while the pioneers were planting crops, they planted schools as well.

Later, railroads were constructed, factories were built, and new machines brutally uprooted people from the farms. Farm

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SP011 786

workers by the thousands trekked to such far-off cities as Cleveland, Detroit, and New York -- moving often not by choice, but shifting in response to an economic and social upheaval over which they had no control and which often they did not fully comprehend.

This more cluttered, more complicated world -- which forced people into new cities and into strange new jobs -- meant more formal education. Twelve years of schooling now became the goal -- at least for those who had the time and money. Something called the free academy was born, and by the end of the 19th century America was building high schools at the rate of more than one a day.

After World War II education in this country took another leap ahead. Schools were hit by an avalanche of students.

* New buildings were built -- almost over night.
* Thousands of new teachers were prepared.
* And in 1965 -- in Washington -- the historic Elementary and Secondary Education Act was passed to promote equality of opportunity for disadvantaged students.

Colleges and universities felt the impact, too. GI's by the thousands went back to college. And the number of high school students going off to higher education increased from one in eight to one in two.

We built more college buildings after World War II than had been built the preceding 300 years. And during the 1960's a new community college was opened in America every 10 days, or little more.

Typically this dramatic growth of education by-passed many worthy students. Gifted young men and women were kept away from schools and colleges by poverty or prejudice -- or both.

But equality of opportunity has at last become the Nation's goal.

This vision of our schools -- this commitment to expanding access -- is crucial. And we must give each new generation the tools it needs to make it on its own.

II

But I don't need to remind this audience of the ways that times have changed.

* The upward surge has stopped.
* School enrollments have declined.
* Our big cities are crippled by fiscal crises.
* School budgets have been slashed, and teaching conditions in many schools continue to deteriorate.
* Teacher contracts have been terminated. In Chicago schools are being closed for lack of funds; in Philadelphia a third of the staff is being cut.

And I don't need to remind this audience that pressures on the teacher have continued to increase. You've been asked to attend meeting after meeting, to fill out forms, to process paperwork.

You've been asked to adjust your curriculum to countless passing fads. And, of course, you've been expected to teach effectively every day, to help solve social problems, and to respond to each new social expectation. And yet, despite these added obligations and persistant pressures, you have carried on your work with dignity and skill.

* You've fought successfully for better schools.
* You've fought for a closer partnership between teachers and other education groups.
* You've helped shape education policy at every level.

And this involvement will persist. Last month Vice President Mondale announced that teachers all across the country will be asked to tell us what they think about Title I, about schools and desegregation, about teaching, and about our Nation's social goals.

Today I'm sending a letter to all of the Chief State School Officers in the Nation urging them to support fully these teacher town meetings, which will be held this September, not in Federal office buildings, but in schools.

The point is this: In our push for excellence, we do not need more paperwork or more time and motion studies. In the end, good education means good teachers, and we intend to give top priority to those who teach.

Today, schools and colleges face what some have called "the steady state." Fewer young teachers are being hired by the schools. The median age of teachers is increasing. And older teachers move less frequently from job to job.

And yet, the world keeps changing. Providing free appropriate education to handicapped children is now a matter of public law. The shrinking resources of the planet Earth make social interdependence a new fact of life. Basic skills are emphasized, and yet, beyond the classroom, reading and writing are declared to be less crucial. Our students travel more, agree with less, and say they want to be in closer contact with "the real world."

Teachers need time to think about this changing world. Alone with students in the classroom, teachers are separated from other professionals. Collegiality is the key source of fresh new ideas, yet the circumstances of your work bar you from this sharing.

Teachers must be given time to prepare new courses, to study with their colleagues, to take time for renewal in a changing world -- and I intend to push aggressively for the continuing education of all teachers during my administration. It will be a top priority.

The Teacher Corps, for example, is being redesigned. We're shifting its emphasis from preparing new teachers to

helping those already in the classroom. Next year the Teacher Corps will serve 80 school districts and 12,000 teachers.

I also support enthusiastically the new Teacher Centers -- an exciting program in which teachers themselves will help decide what they need to study.

It seems incredible that something so obvious -- giving teachers control over their own continuing education -- has taken so long to introduce.

But now we do have continuing education centers for classroom teachers, and I applaud Al Shanker and the AFT for pushing for this creative legislation from the very start.

Next year, because of aggressive leadership, we will have 60 new Teacher Centers across the country. Eight and a quarter million dollars will be distributed, and 40,000 teachers will be engaged in programs they themselves have planned. I want you to know that I'm going to press for effective administration of this vital program.

In the days ahead I'd like to see all teachers involved in a systematic, ongoing education program. And I'd like to see networks of schools and colleges join together to form regional Teacher Centers all across the land.

To put it as directly as I can, I'm convinced that the continuing education of our teachers, with appropriate time off

to do the job, is vitally needed. If excellence in education is our goal -- and this Administration is firmly committed to that objective -- then we must continue to educate those who teach.

III

But educating those who educate will be insufficient. I'm convinced, as Al Shanker has so eloquently reminded you, that as we move into the Third Century, we will be educating, and re-educating, all sorts of people not now in school.

Traditional life patterns are beginning to break apart, and the impact on our schools and colleges will be enormous. Let me explain this essential point.

In the past, we chopped up the span of human life into slices -- like a great salami -- each with a special flavor all its own.

* First came early childhood -- three or four years of happy play.
* Then for 12 to 20 years, perhaps, we had a slice of life called formal education.
* Next came 40 or more years of full-time work.
* And, finally, we had a little nubbin at the end, characterized by some as "dignified decline." Traditionally, these four life stages were kept rigidly apart, clanking along behind the others like freight cars trailing behind an engine.

What does all of this have to do with education? Very much indeed, for education, too, became locked into the iron vise of custom. Campuses became ghettos for the young. Students were expected to "finish" school before they entered the so-called "world of work," never to return. Older students who did venture back to school were viewed as "retreads" engaged in a kind of "salvage operation."

But now this has begun to change. Today, about 40 percent of all boys and girls enroll in pre-school programs before they go to kindergarten. Thousands now watch Sesame Street and The Electric Company in the home.

And the rigid, brittle line between the so-called "play years" and the "years of school" have become completely blurred.

Older children have changed as well. Puberty now occurs two years earlier than 50 years ago. As someone recently declared, if Booth Tarkington were writing Seventeen today, he'd have to title it Fifteen. College students now have the right to vote, and they have the right of legal contract in 43 out of 50 States.

Further, many students are now "stepping out" of college for a while, or they're enrolling for only part-time study, trying to break out of what seems to be a time of endless incubation.

A recent American Council on Education study revealed that over 55 percent of all those enrolled in some form of post-secondary education are part-time students. Clearly, the so-called college-going years are now less well defined. To add to the confusion, the neat and tidy adult world is also breaking up. In 1900 the average workweek in America was 62 hours long; in 1945 it dropped to 43; today it's 37½ hours.

And the shorter four-day workweek for some businesses is now a serious proposition. And, rather than stick doggedly to just one job, many adults are, during their working years, choosing four or five careers.

Finally, life has changed for older people too. Life expectancy increased from 47 years in 1900 to 72 years in 1974, and it's estimated that by the year 2000 nearly 30 percent of the American population will be over 50. Further, many people now face premature retirement -- out-distanced by the pace of change. This early obsolescence not only wastes our precious talent, but is also, in simple human terms, tragic.

The point is this: Life patterns for all of us have sharply shifted, and, even though the baby boom has slackened, the need for education has increased.

For the first time in human history, education, work, and leisure are intertwined. Education must be viewed not simply as a pre-work ritual, but as a process to be pursued from the beginning of life to its end.

This means more responsibility for the schools and colleges, not less. We need more teachers to serve more students of all ages, and we need to link our schools and colleges more closely to other social institutions.

Schools should be linked more closely to the home. During the early years children's attitudes are shaped and values are formed. Parents -- the first teachers -- must become partners with public school teachers in early childhood education. Seminars for parents and introductory visits to the schools by young children can help build a better bridge between these two essential institutions. Schools should be linked more closely to hospitals and other institutions where professionals must re-educate themselves.

Schools and colleges should relate to business and industry as well. In his recent book on work Studs Terkel says that unfulfilling work "may have touched, malignantly, the soul of our society" -- perhaps repeating Camus, who wrote: "Without work all life goes rotten, but when work is soulless, life stifles and dies."

Clearly, we must add education to our work. In the future, I suspect we'll have more education agreements in labor contracts -- arrangements which will permit employees to attend seminars or mini-courses or view video lectures while at work.

And why can't more Americans be given a mini-sabbatical from time to time, a chance for recurrent education to enrich their lives and refine their skills?

Finally, schools and colleges should be linked to places where older men and women live. Why can't we take education into the nursing homes and the retirement villages? Why should a person, after a lifetime of productive work, be allowed to vegetate intellectually simply because he or she is physically impaired?

Sauna baths and shuffleboard form a patronizing -- and too common -- view of later life. Those years can and should be more productive.

Several years ago I suggested that, since we have Medicare for the body, we might consider Edu-care for the mind, an arrangement that would make our schools and colleges more available to older citizens.

In 1941 FDR inspired the Nation with his "Four Freedoms." And now, as a Third Century vision of our Nation's future, let's add another: the "Freedom to Learn" -- regardless of one's age or stage of life. Let's reaffirm the age-old proposition that learning and human dignity walk together hand in hand.

IV

One final observation. I'm concerned that all of us must begin to think about a world where hard choices must be made, where basic values are shaped by our commitment to the future and not by the selfish satisfactions of today.

Early in this century the American philosopher Josiah Royce suggested that, while we are becoming more knowing and more skeptical, we somehow do not seem to be growing more profound or more reverent.

We need to search for answers to those over-arching problems that transcend the bureaucratic boxes within which we carry on our work. We need to confront together the truly fundamental issues which Al Shanker talks about with such vividness.

There are rumblings that western civilization may be entering what some have called the greatest revolution of perspective since the Renaissance. Today we must teach children not only basic skills; we must teach the young -- and older people, too -- about the Earth and all its inhabitants.

The human race continues to expand at the rate of 200,000 people every day. That's 73 million more people every year, and every day more than 800 million people face gnawing hunger, living literally from hand to mouth. Tensions over resources grow more acute, and the quality of our environment is threatened. The questions of the future, then, are these:

Where will we get our food, and how can it be appropriately distributed?

What about our energy supply, and how can it be equitably shared?

How can we reduce the poisons in the atmosphere?

Can we have a proper balance between population and the life support system of this planet Earth?

And how can we live together with civility in a climate of constraint?

These are the transcendent questions that together we must begin to talk about and think about.

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Recently, at a seminar in the ancient Persian city of Persepolis, I heard John Gardner say:

> Our planet is but a speck of dust in the universe, and our life on it is but an instant in the long stretch of astrophysical time. Still, it is the only planet we have, and our life on it holds great possibilities of beauty and dignity and meaning. Yet, if it were asked of us how we spend our instant of time on our speck of dust, we would have to say, 'We spend a good deal of it fighting one another and laying waste our Earth.'

"Surely," Gardner went on to say, "all of us here believe we can do better."

It just may be that as we support our schools and teachers, and commit ourselves to life-long education, we will not only enrich our own lives, but in the process also make our future more secure.

Thanks for inviting me to meet with you today.

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